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BOSNIA ROUNDTABLE
26 February 1998
Report by Metta Spencer

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CANADIAN CENTRE FOR FOREIGN POLICY DEVELOPMENT
Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa
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Participants: Hon. Lloyd Axworthy, M.P., Nedzad Basic, Charles Court, Mihailo Crnobrnja, Mohamed Dzuuhur, Lorna Jean Edmunds, Donald Fleming, John Graham, Eric Hoskins, Robert Howse, Steve Lee, Reno Lukic, Eileen Oleniuk, Malcolm Peat, David Rudd, Metta Spencer, Dennis Stevens, Marie Gervais Vidricaire, Steve Wallace, Kate White.

Marie Gervais Vidricaire launched the meeting with an excellent and encouraging summation of the projects in which Canada has been engaged in Bosnia. Next the meeting turned to a general discussion of the current situation, followed in the afternoon by a discussion of specific policy recommendations. Finally, after the discussion had gone on for a good part of the day, we were joined by Minister Axworthy, who listened and answered questions. Most of the following points were made by only one or two speakers, but (except where noted) they were not disputed by others and can probably be taken as representing a consensus.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION IN BOSNIA

• We discussed whether the basic Dayton plan can be sustained or whether stabilization will inevitably require that Republika Srpska (RS) be allowed to join Serbia and the Croats join Croatia. While some people had resigned themselves to that depressing outcome, most others insisted that Dayton will remain "the only game in town," and reported signs that the situation may be improving lately. There have been some very encouraging changes in the last two months — especially since Dodik took office. Some 18 deputies of the SDA actually supported the Dodik government, which is a breakthrough. Over two-thirds of the municipal elections have been validated.

• The peacekeepers are performing their functions well, and NATO is discussing the future of SFOR. No longer is there any intention of specifying an end-date; instead, what is planned is to specify the desired end-*state* and develop means of measuring progress toward that state. We will need a light touch in measuring progress, for most Bosnians do not know how behave like a liberal democracy.

• The return of refugees is disappointing — only some 25,000 have returned home so far. Professor Lukic has been looking into the type of initiative that works best in encouraging the return of refugees and has concluded that it is the "Open City" concept. The Canadian contribution of $450,000 to UNHCR has already partly been allocated to funding the Open City initiative and DFAIT has suggested to CIDA that they ask it be devoted more to that, especially to two recently opened towns in RS.

• The most debated theme concerned the question of establishing democracy. Some participants feel that the process of continuously intervening in Bosnian affairs amounts to treating the region as an "intensive care patient" and thereby increasing a sense of isolation and dependency instead of allowing Bosnians to take care of their own politics.

Other participants maintain that there is no alternative in the near term to "twisting their arms" to change Bosnian politics. Though democracy is the goal, the progress until now has not resulted from any internal consensus but from prodding. No development could have happened had there not been a derogation of sovereignty in the Dayton agreement. In fact, the US has been behind crucial decisions, especially the timing and manner of the elections. The majority of citizens want Bosnia to be fragmented, not united and independent. Regrettably, polls showed last summer that the most aggressive segment of the population is highly educated. Politicians will probably continue to drag their feet for years, and so international intervention must continue.

In fact, many or most of the groups promoting democracy in Bosnia have stated all along that they favor strong intervention -- indeed, even the establishment of a protectorate there for a considerable period until the conditions for fair elections can be established. Recently Carlos Westendorp has been given a wider mandate and is using it to solve some issues where the elected officials have balked. In no sense does this make Bosnia a protectorate, but it may suffice to get it through its crisis. In any case, instead of concentrating on Sarajevo, it makes sense for the international community to work on building civil society throughout the country. There is now enough progress in RS to make it appropriate to fund projects there.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS FROM NGO PARTICIPANTS:

<u>For the OSCE and Electoral Reform</u>

• The chairman of the OSCE electoral commission can make rules and break deadlocks that would otherwise occur. If the present electoral system continues to result in deadlocks, that alternative exists and should be used. Too much obstruction has been tolerated. On the other hand, the 1998 elections should not be treated as a make-or-break event. To state that September is crucial would be a big mistake, because in fact the extreme nationalist parties are likely to win. Several years of attention will be required.

• A new formula is needed for elections. It is important for each party to demonstrated that it can work in a coalition with another party or parties. At present, Dodik has a working coalition, but this will not happen in the Federation, so it is necessary to change the rules enough to make that possible.

• The Serb Civic Council in Sarajevo — a democratic NGO supporting a multicultural Bosnia — complains that the current constitution of Bosnia requires that Serbian representatives to the federal parliament be elected only in RS, while Croatian and Bosniac representatives to the federal parliament may be elected only in the Federation. They object to the fact that Serbs in the Federation, as well as Croats and Bosniacs in RS, are unable to be represented by members of their own community. They would

like the constitution to be changed so that all parties and all nationalities are equally enfranchised throughout Bosnia.

• The International Crisis Group (ICG) has a different proposal for electoral reform. They note that at all levels of government a Serbian candidate can be elected without receiving the vote of a single Croat or Bosniac, a Croat can be elected without receiving the vote of a single Bosniac or Serb, and a Bosniac can be elected without receiving the vote of a single Serb or Croat. Indeed, in a situation of mutual suspicion and ethnic antagonism, voters tends to support an ethnic party that is quite militant in protecting the interests of its own community. This perpetuates polarization.

The ICG recognizes that almost all Bosnian voters support candidates and parties of their own nationality. Their reform therefore allocate a number of seats to each ethnic group in accordance with, say, the pre-war ethnic distribution of the area. Then all parties of each group would nominate candidates for those seats, generating three different lists — one for each ethnicity. However, *each voter* would vote for *all three* lists. This would force candidates and parties to develop platforms that are acceptable to the entire Bosnian electorate, not just to their own nationality, thus fostering a politics of moderation and compromise.

For the International Community

• We should increase the "protectorate" elements, not expect a liberal democracy because it will be necessary first to overcome extreme nationalism. Bosnia has to be dependent before it can become independent.

• International military force will remain necessary but it may be possible to reduce it after the elections in September.

• Postpone the decision on Brcko.

• Put as much money as possible into the media before the elections, to provide correct information. The biggest obstacle to integration is the feeling of insecurity created by the abuse of the media. It is not enough to provide alternative information; censorship of the official television is required to prevent hate speech and other abusive comments. However, if extra information is introduced for the sake of balance, it will not be accepted as credible unless the system is worked out with the local population. For example, domestic TV was introduced, but it only turned out to be a costly failure.

• The International Police Task Force is the weak link in the chain established by the international community. Strengthen it, especially at the senior levels. Train the local police. It will take at least one year to make the police less politicized. Also, train the judiciary.

• Support the decentralization of programs of health, social care, and education to the canton and sub-cantonal level. Promote *integrated programs* for refugees, housing, health, jobs, and the like. There are many groups of powerful players in Bosnia now — for example, in primary health care — that lack any members who are Bosnian. The local people must be the major stakeholders.

• The UNDP sent Mario Gonzales to Bosnia as an economic advisor to cantonal governments. The same kind of thing may be desirable on a wider scale.

• Private enterprises are starting up some inter-state economic cooperation between Serbia, the Federation, and so on. This should be encouraged in all possible ways.

For the Government of Canada

• The soft options for intervention — humanitarian aid, election assistance, etc — are uncontroversial. It is the hard options, especially military intervention where there is risk involved, that encounter political opposition. Peacekeeping should be shared. Canadians should not let our aversion to risk get the better of us; we should be prepared to chase down war criminals, even though this will be dangerous.

• Support the work of media experts and subcommissions. The Swiss and Soros have given the media a high priority, but the media subcommittee does not have enough teeth. We can contribute much by offering training in journalism and media technology, and by supporting further syndication link-ups.

• Coordination between programs is crucial. That is managed by the High Representative, but it is difficult and Canadians can directly arrange more cooperative projects with other countries. Norway and Japan, for example, are promising partners for integrated projects with Canada, working to assist disadvantaged populations (the unemployed, etc), and retraining them to contribute in their own environment. This is "community-based rehabilitation."

• Offer political party training. Hold Forums of Dialogue. Help the war crimes tribunal; send forensic experts.

For Canadian Civil Society

• Canadian NGOs have one special asset — domestic experience with multiculturalism — which, on occasion, can lend insights to people working in Bosnia.

• Nurture economic exchanges. Companies in Canada may be able to contribute to integration by working with indigenous firms, and by encouraging economic activity across the borders of the new countries of the former Yugoslavia. It is also time now to begin investing in RS.

• Canadian NGOs can bring together communities of interest (e.g. women) to create a space for discourse.

• Encourage access to the Internet, especially so local citizens and journalists can witness authorities being queried.